

## Solomon Islands

### Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

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| • Authorization Date                  | 23 October 2000<br>(Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué)      |
| • Start Date                          | July 2003  |
| • Head of Mission                     | Tim George (Australia)                                     |
| • Budget                              | \$179.5 million<br>(October 2007–September 2008)           |
| • Strength as of<br>30 September 2008 | Troops: 220<br>Civilian Police: 306<br>Civilian Staff: 161 |

The year 2008 marked thirty years of Solomon Island independence and the fifth year of operation for the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Following several years of tense relations between RAMSI and the government, improved relations during the year allowed for significant progress in establishing more efficient governing and security structures.

In 2003, after consultation with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), RAMSI was established at the request of then–prime minister Sir Alan Kemakeza, in tandem with the Facilitation of International Assistance Act, passed by parliament in 2003 to help restore law and order to the island after five years of conflict between Malatian and Guale ethnic groups. During the conflict, both factions used government positions and resources to support their causes, with devastating impact on the country’s infrastructure. Invoking their military and police components known as the Combined Task Force, and the Participating Police Force, RAMSI deployed on 24 July 2003 and was able to secure the

surrender of both parties, collect weapons, arrest and charge perpetrators, and remove rogue elements from the Solomon Island Police Force.

In addition to assisting in the initial security stabilization phase, RAMSI was mandated to assist in the development of the Solomon Islands in three key areas: law and justice, economic governance, and the development of the government. After reinstating law and order, the Participating Police Force set out to train the Solomon Island Police Force, while the civilian component of RAMSI embedded representatives in the Solomon Island government to work on capacity building.

While Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, beginning in 2006, adopted an anti-RAMSI stance due to its predominantly Australian composition, riots during April 2006 in Honiara, the capital, highlighted the need for continued support. After several failed attempts, the opposition succeeded in passing a vote of no confidence on Sogavare in December 2007. The election of Prime Minister Derek Sikua shortly after brought about a new phase of cooperation between the government and RAMSI.

In February 2008, the Solomon Island government, RAMSI, and the PIF convened the third round of consultations on Solomon Island–RAMSI cooperation, known as the Enhanced Consultative Mechanism. Based on a 2007 PIF–RAMSI task force report, the parties agreed to the creation of the Forum of Ministerial Standing Committee (FMSC) to foster communication and coordination among themselves. The FMSC comprises the foreign ministers of the past, present, and future chairs of the Pacific Islands Forum, plus representatives from the Solomon Islands and Australia, and is supported at

the official level by the Enhanced Consultative Mechanism and a triumvirate composed of the RAMSI Special Coordinator, the Solomon Island Special Envoy, and the PIF representative to the Solomon Islands. The inaugural meeting of the FMSC decided that RAMSI should report directly to the Solomon Islands government and should shift its priority from collective security to nation building.

As part of RAMSI's continued engagement, in July 2008 it announced support for a ten-year Australian-funded public service improvement

program to support development of the civil service sector and effective public institutions. Australia pledged an additional 140 soldiers for a four-month deployment in order to assist the Participating Police Force with street patrols.

In May 2008, Prime Minister Sikua stated that he saw a need for RAMSI over the next decade. If the prevailing good relations between the government and the mission are maintained, the prospects for the Solomon Islands consolidating its hard-won peace in the coming year are high.